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DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

FIRDAUSĪ'S *SHĀHNĀMAH* AND THE *GENEALOGIA*  
*REGNI DEI*<sup>1</sup>

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"I end the story of Shāh Yazdagird,  
And in Sapandārmad, the day of Ard,  
The year four hundred of Muhammad's Flight,  
The last words of this royal book I write.  
For ever flourishing be Shāh Mahmūd,  
His head still green, his heart with joy imbued.  
I have so lauded him that publicly  
And privily my words will never die.  
Of praises from the Great I had much store;  
The praises that I give to him are more.  
May he, the man of wisdom, live for aye,  
His doings turn to his content alway.  
This tale of sixty thousand couplets I  
Have left to him by way of memory.  
My life from days of youth to eld hath sped  
In talk and hearkening what others said.  
When this, my famous tale, was done at last  
O'er all the realm my reputation past.  
All men of prudence, rede and Faith will give  
Applause to me when I have ceased to live,  
Yet live I shall; the seeds of words have I  
Flung broad-cast and henceforth I shall not die."<sup>2</sup>

In these words, Firdausī concluded his task of writing the *Shāhnāmah* or Book of Kings, when in sight of fourscore years on

<sup>1</sup> Presidential Address, delivered at the meeting of the Middle West Branch of the Society, in Ann Arbor, April 25th, 1935, in commemoration of the Millennium of the birth of the poet Firdausi.

<sup>2</sup> *The Shāhnāmah of Firdausi*, done into English by Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner, London, 1905-1925, ix, p. 122. I have confined my references and quotations to this edition, as the most accessible that is available. The references to the Persian text are given in the margin. In future references it will be cited *Firdausi* (Tr. W.).

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February 25th, A. D. 1010. He was, according to an earlier line, seventy-one years of age, from which it would follow that he was born about the year 940 A. D. but the general view inclines to a much earlier date. Firdausi may have been born anytime between 932 and 941 A. D.<sup>3</sup> The date accepted by His Majesty Ridha Shāh Pahlavi is 934 A. D. In the year that is past, probably the most significant event was Persia's celebration of the millennium of her Epic Poet's birth in October last. From the Seven Climes, wherever the *Shāhnāmāh* is known, the tributes tendered in his praise have endorsed the pride of his concluding boast.

In the quest for a topic for my Presidential Address, it appeared to be fitting and proper to bow to the all compelling decree of destiny, and to accept the honour, so graciously bestowed by the Members of the Middle-West Branch of this Society, as the opportunity to be the mouthpiece of the Society's tribute of homage, and to attempt an ascription of the glory due to the Poet of the Divine Glory of the King. Others, better fitted than I, have praised his poetic art. To me falls the humbler lot of assessing the place of his Epic in the annals of that earthly manifestation of the Kingdom of God, inherent in the person of the King of Kings, whose *Khilāfat* is alike direct from God, as it extends from remotest antiquity to the present occupant of the Throne of the Glory, the Shadow of God on earth, His Majesty Ridha Shāh Pahlavi.

Before the greatness of the throne and the grandeur of Firdausi's own achievement the mere historian may well stand appalled, and, "conscious of his own defects, sue for mercy at the threshold of the Grace." He can, however, use the opportunity of his *mugaddama* for the appropriate purpose of acknowledging the debt of the West to those scholars whose labours have rendered the Epic accessible and intelligible. Pre-eminent among these stands Theodor Noldeke whose edition of Tabari and essay *Das Iranische Nationalepos*<sup>4</sup> lay the foundations of any approach; the editors of the text, Mohl, Vullers, Lumsden and Turner-Macan, and for the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 24; Th. Nöldeke, "Das Iranische National Epos" in *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*, herausgegeben v. W. Geiger u. E. Kuhn, Strassburg, 1896-1904 (Cit. *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*), II, 158 ff.; E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, II, 135 ff.; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, II, 110, s. v. Firdausi (Cl. Huart).

<sup>4</sup> Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte d. Perser u. Araber z. Zeit. d. Sasaniden*, aus d. arab. Chron. d. Tabari übersetzt. Leyden, 1879 and v. *supra*, n. 3.

English speaking world, the translations of Champion, Atkinson and particularly Arthur and Edward Warner.<sup>5</sup> I would commend the last piece of work as a translation at once faithful and literary, accompanied by invaluable notes and appendices, to any who would attempt to understand the meaning of the Kingdom of God on earth in the kindred *Shāhnāmah*, which has given rise to the Four Gospels of the Christian Church, and to the Messianic Hope, which they claim to satisfy.<sup>6</sup>

The task before us is to attempt an assessment of Firdausi's place in the Genealogy of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is not quite the same thing as the estimate of Firdausi as the poetic historian of the idea, though some consideration of that question of necessity forms part of the scheme. The real problem is to discover his place in history, rather than his place among historians or his value as an historical authority. I hope to show, in the time available, that it is here that his significance really lies. The *Shāhnāmah* belongs to the category of works, which mark the foundations of sovereignty and the declaration of the basis of Divine Right by which Kings rule. Its kindred are the *Zamyād Yast*, Deutero-Isaiah, *The Book of Daniel*, the Gospels, S. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, Marsiglio of Padua's *Defensor Pacis*, and the succession of works to which the *Shāhnāmah* itself gave rise—the *Zafarnāmah*, the *Akbarnāmah* and the monuments of Mughal monarchy. Like the *Akbarnāmah*, the *Shāhnāmah* is in reality a Declaration of Independence.<sup>7</sup> It is Persia's declaration that her Kingship derives its authority not from the comparatively recent *Khilāfat-u'-rasūl-i'llāhi*, but from the immemorial antiquity of the *Khilāfat-u'llāh* whose succession dates back to Zartušt and beyond, while its vicegerency is ever present in the possession of the *farr*—the *hvarēnō Kavaēm*, the Divine Glory of the Kayanians.

<sup>5</sup> V. *supra*, n. 2, *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), I, 76-87; *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*, II, 206 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. my paper "Regnum et Ecclesia," *Church History*, III (1934), pp. 24 ff.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the position underlying Abū'l-Fazl's *Akbarnāmah* v. my paper "A New Interpretation of Akbar's 'Infallibility' Decree of 1579" *J. R. A. S.* (1924), pp. 591-608. Also a discussion by Professor 'Abdu'l-Ghani in *A History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court* (Allahabad, 1929-), III, 243-46. For reasons which I notice later, I feel his rejection of the *Shāhnāmah* in favour of the *Zafarnāmah* as the foundation of the *Akbarnāmah* is unfortunate.

Both Firdausī and Abū'l-Faẓl had the same task to perform for their respective monarchs and states—their deliverance from the thralldom of an unrecognized Muslim authority by means which would not undermine the authority of the King under whom they lived, and the appeal of both is ultimately to the same source—the Kayan Glory ‘that cannot be forcibly seized,’ and the victory of Ahūramazda’s deputy (*Khalifah*) over Azī Dahhāk, of the Kingdom of the Light over the powers of Darkness. Its power is seen in the title and it pervades the language of Ghulām ‘Alī Khān’s work, the *Shāh ‘Ālamnāmah*, at the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth century, when in face of defeat and usurpation, he portrays Shāh ‘Ālam II (1761-1806) as the true vice-gerent of Allāh in the throes of his struggle with Ahrimān and Azī Dahhāk; and in Shāh ‘Ālam’s own works under the *takhallus*, *Āftāb*.

The subject falls into five main divisions: First, the historical setting of Firdausī’s life and work and his attitude to the developments which were taking place in his own lifetime; secondly, the historical, mythological and theological background of Firdausī’s argument, together with its principal western offshoots; thirdly, the Sunnī Muslim position, which appears in the traditions of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate of Bāghdād, and the strength of Persian influence even in Arabic sources; fourthly, the occasion and setting of the *Shāhnāmah*; and fifthly, the significance of the *Shāhnāmah* in subsequent political theory and developments in the Muslim world. Within the limits of this survey, I hope to show the unity of the system of monarchy and consequently the unity of its literary expression not only in the millennium and a half which separates the capture of Babylon by Cyrus and the year of Firdausī’s birth, but also in the subsequent millennium in which the Orient has lived and thought in terms of his *Shāhnāmah*, which is the Epic of the manifestation of the Glory of the Kingdom of God on earth.

First, the historical setting of Firdausī’s life and work.

Before the middle of the ninth century A. D., the decay of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate had set in, beyond any hope of stay or check, so that after a century from the battle of the Zāb (750 A. D.), the forces of Persian national life, at first harnessed and then repressed, were free once more to assert themselves. The evidence

of their re-appearance is varied. The ancient Persian families, which had adopted the Muslim faith for political reasons, stood forth as leaders in the houses of Tāhir and Sāmān. The House of Ghazna claimed descent from Yazdagird III and the Sāmānids from Bahrām Chubān, while the popular movement found its expression in the lead of Ya'qūb the Coppersmith and his dynasty (867-903 A. D.). With the revival of Persian national family life, there emerged from their hiding, the heroic traditions of the Sāsānian nobility, and these appeared not only in a revival of Pahlavī literature, of which the *Dēnkard* is evidence but also in the revival of the *Shī'at-'Alī* in a variety of forms, particularly in the preservation of the marriage of Ḥusain with 'the Gazelle,' a daughter of the Sāsānian House, awarded to the son of 'Alī by 'Umar.<sup>8</sup> Throughout, the note of the appeal is to the House of

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<sup>8</sup> For the claims to Sāsānid royal ancestry: of the Ghaznavids, from Yazdagird III v. Muhammad Nāzim, *Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 34, n. 1; of the Sāmānids from Bahrām Chubān, *ibid.*, pp. 180 ff.; and *Enc. Islam*, IV, s. v. Sāmānid: of the Būwayhids, E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, I, 364; cf. the descent of Ardashīr Pāpakān from the Kayan Sāsān, v. *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), VI, 197 ff. and refs.; G. Rawlinson, *The Seventh Monarchy* (1876), pp. 32-33 and notes; Cl. Huart, *La Perse Antique* (1925), 147 ff.; *Enc. Brit.* (11th ed.), II, 448. Cf.

"Wilt thou treat Yazdagird, the king of kings,  
Worse than malignant Turks . . . ?

. . . From sire to sire his ancestors  
Were mighty men and compassers of wisdom  
From Nūshīrwān, the Shāh, back to Ardshīr,  
While, seventh backward from Ardshīr, Sāsān  
The world-lord, had the crown, for God entrusted  
To him the Kaian crown, and all the kings  
Were of that glorious race."

*Firdausi* (Tr. W.), IX, 105, and n. 1.

For the date of the *Dinkard* v. E. W. West in *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*, II, 91,

"According to statements contained in the last section of Book III, its compilation was commenced by Atur-farnbag, son of Farukhzat, a leading high-priest of the Mazda-worshippers, who had a religious disputation with Abalish in the presence of the Khalifah Al-Mamun who reigned in 813-833. And the work was completed by Aturpat, son of Hemet, who is mentioned in the *Iranian Bundahish*, XLV, 11, as a contemporary of Zat-sparam, who is known to have been living in 881, when the third Epistle of Manushtshihar was written."

For the story of Shahrbanu Bēgam v. E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, I, 130-134. The whole subject of the Persian revival in the tenth century A. D. is treated fully by E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, I, 339-480.

Sāsān, and the preservation of the line of legitimist right to the throne of Persia by lineal descent, which resides in the hidden succession from the Kayans to the Sāsānids, the succession inherent in the Imāms and the Sayyids, and, finally in 'the Hidden Imām and the doctrine of the *Mahdī*.'

Nor is the legitimist descent, derived from birth, the only way. Persian Kingship is ultimately a mystical concept. It is possible, therefore, for it to lie hidden in mystic orders, whether they be the order of the fire-priests of Persepolis or the Ṣūfīs of Gīlān, whence sprang the Ṣafawī dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

The victories of the Ghaznawid House had brought to completion the process by which Persia was once more united politically, under a King of her own national stock. Maḥmūd's claim to descent from Yazdagird III is, in itself, sufficient to account for the favourable view of Yazdagird and the air of hostility towards the Arabs, who belong to Turān, whose king is Azī Dahhāk. One reference is sufficient to illustrate this point.<sup>10</sup> When Rustam the son of Hurmuzd, on the eve of Kadisiyya, his last fight with the Arabs,

"observed the stars and smote  
His head because it was a day of bale,"

he wrote to his brother as follows

"When I agnized this secret of the sky—  
That it assigneth us but grievous travail—  
I wept right sorely for the Iranians  
And burned for the Sasanians. Woe is me  
For head and crown, for state and throne, and woe  
For majesty, for fortune, and for Grace  
Because hereafter will defeat betide them  
From the Arabians, the stars will not turn  
Save to our hurt, and for four hundred years  
None of our royal race will rule the world!"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For the genealogy of the firepriests of Persepolis and the origins of the Sāsānid claim to Kayan descent v. Cl. Huart, *La Perse Antique*, pp. 147 ff.; *Enc. Brit.* (11th ed.), II, 418; D. D. Peshotan Sanjana, *The Kārnāmē ī Artakshshār ī Pāpakān*, Bombay, 1896, pp. ii f., viii f., 2, App., p. 6; on the Ṣūfī dynasty of Gīlān and their claim to Ṣaiyid descent, E. G. Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia*, III, 464; also v. *supra*, n. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), IX, 73.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 73-4.



The four centuries reaches its term in Mahmūd of Ghaznī and the completion of the *Shāhnāmah*. The interim

"Hath been the epoch of 'Umar, made known  
The Faith, and to a pulpit changed the throne."<sup>12</sup>

It is, in the eyes of Firdausī, a parallel of the Ashkanian (Arsacid) period, when

"Folk called them 'Tribal Kings.' Two centuries passed,  
And thou hadst said: 'There is no Shāh.'"<sup>13</sup>

This fact determines the approach of Firdausī to his task. He was probably a *Shī'ah*, and therefore had less sympathy for 'the epoch of 'Umar' than for the preceding royal house of Sāsān. Mahmūd was a *Sunnī*, so that it was necessary to temper the *Shī'ah* antipathy to the second *Khalīfah* and to find the necessary compensation in the words he placed in the mouth of Bahrām, and the other loyal supporters of Yazdagird III. The course he adopted, however, placed him on the horns of a dilemma, for his enemies at the Court of Mahmūd were able to point to both his *Shī'ah* belief and his undue affection for the Fire-worshipper.<sup>14</sup> His satire on Mahmūd contains his reply to these criticisms.

"Ho! Shāh Mahmūd who hast as victor trod  
The climes! if man thou fearest not fear God,  
For there were many Shāhs ere thou hadst birth  
Who all were crownèd monarchs of the earth  
And all of them pre-eminent o'er thee  
In treasure, host, throne, crown, and dignity.  
They did no act that was not good and right,  
Went not about to swindle and to spite,  
Dealt with their subjects justly and were naught  
If not God's worshippers."

And

"But is there, tell me this, one viler yet  
Than he whose heart against 'Alī is set?"<sup>15</sup>

The appeal of Firdausī, then, is to the Glory of the House of

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 121, cf. p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 210.

<sup>14</sup> Th. Nöldeke, "Das Iranische Nationalepos," *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*, II, 153 ff.; E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, II, 129 ff.; *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), I, 40.

<sup>15</sup> *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), I, 40.

Sāsān, particularly to Nushīrwān, whose justice becomes proverbial even among the Muslimīn, against all invaders. His object is to place its Glory on the background of immemorial right, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Consequently, the pre-Sāsānian history and mythology is forced into the mould of the Sāsānid, while, even the Sāsānian history is subject to that form of compression or synthesis which marks the form of the heroic story or saga. For, it must be remembered that Firdausī's object was not to write a history of the Kings of Persia but rather to produce the King's Book, an *Eikōn Basilikē*,—the *Shāhnāmah*,—in order to enshrine the memory of the Glory of the Kingdom, at the time when its political realization was rendered imminent by the triumphs of Yazdagird III's descendant Subuktigīn, the father of Maḥmūd of Ghaznī, to whom the poem is dedicated.<sup>16</sup>

The result of this treatment shows itself in several ways. First, there is a certain foreshortening of the background. This effect destroys the value of Firdausī as an historian at a variety of points. His tendency to concentrate into the term Tūrān all the Asiatic enemies of Irān is an example. The treatment of the Rūmī feud, along similar lines, is another case in point. They fix, however, the Persian point of view in his own time, but, what is more important, they fit into the traditional Persian heroic scheme of the King and the Enemy, Azī Dahhāk.<sup>17</sup> This form is ultimately Median, Magian and Zoroastrian, and it is given an ultimate theological form in the struggle between Ahūra Mazda and Ahrimān for the possession of the Glory. The *Shāhnāmah*, indeed, is the most complete account of the struggle in existence. It is, moreover, oriental in its entirety, and free from any serious adulteration from Hellenistic or Arabic sources, for though it is certain that Firdausī was not ignorant of Arabic, yet he appears not to have written in the language, and to have had little sympathy with the spirit of the Arabic interpretations of his theme.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> On the place of the Kayan Glory or Grace (*hvarēnō Kavaēm*), *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), *passim*, particularly Jamshīd (I, 129-140); cf. *Zamyād Yast*, S. B. E., XXIII, 286-309. On Nūshīrwān, v. *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), VIII, *passim*; cf. Rawlinson, *The Seventh Monarchy*, pp. 379 ff. and Sā'adi, *The Scroll of Wisdom*, ed. A. N. Woollaston (*Wisdom of the East Series*).

<sup>17</sup> For an example of Firdausī's treatment of Roman affairs v. *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), VI, 294 ff.

<sup>18</sup> V. E. G. Browne, *Lit. Hist. Pers.*, II, 145 ff.; *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), I, 47.

Out of this consideration emerges perhaps the most important conclusion concerning Firdausi's place in the *Genealogia Regni Dei*. He marks a point of crystallization of the traditions, oriental, in general, and Persian, in particular, concerning the proper embodiment in letters and saga of the reign of the King. The Royal Hero King is faced from his birth with the machinations of Ahrimān, either directly in his diabolic (Firdausi frequently uses Iblis for Ahrimān) form or indirectly through the mediation of Azī Dahhāk, and on the successful manipulation of the situation depends the rest of the reign. His knowledge of the method of disposing of the Enemy—his wisdom and 'justice'—are the accompaniments and outward manifestations of the possession of the Glory. For that reason Harpagus advised Cyrus to pretend to be lacking in wisdom, because it would throw doubt on the Magian award and, thereby, serve to protect him from Azī Dahhāk (Astyages).<sup>19</sup>

The presence of this normal form of 'King Book' or *Shāhnāmāh* suggests kinship in the works in which its development appears, and that suggestion, confirmed by other elements, amounts to certainty. This point is best illustrated by the place of Cyrus in Western literature. The royal shepherd *motif* appears in all forms of the Cyrus legends, and it is ultimately merged into the Magian recognition—or its national priestly counterpart—and the proof of wisdom, revealed at the age of ten, twelve or sixteen. Its final proof lies in the complete victory, whereby Azī Dahhāk is overthrown and Babylon—or Bāghdād—is captured. The treatment of Herodotus and Xenophon bears all the marks, not of historical but of heroic treatment of Cyrus, and it is as offshoots of the Cyrus *Shāhnāmāh* that they should be regarded.<sup>20</sup> The same—

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<sup>19</sup> *Enc. Brit.* (11th ed.), II, 821a (Astyages), VII, 706b ff. (Cyrus). Both articles are by Eduard Meyer. I suggest that the Armenian identification with Azī Dahhāk, though its appearance in literature is late, reflects Persian opinion and contains the key to the conflict of names. Cyaxares the Mede, as the enemy of Persia would be known as Azī Dahhāk in Persia prior to the conquest of Media by Cyrus. For a recent discussion of the question in another connexion v. H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel*, Cardiff, 1935, pp. 30 ff.

<sup>20</sup> *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), II, 328 ff. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* is, indeed, an excellent account of the consequences of the possession of the Royal Glory (*hvarenō Kavaēm*) in righteous rule, wisdom, and the ability to interpret the will of the deity.

and more—is true of the passage assigned to deutero-Isaiah, where we find not only the normal Cyrus *motif*, but also the suffering Servant, which in *Sīyawūsh* is as characteristic of Persian as of Jewish thought. In addition, the assignment of the divine source of the Kingship of Cyrus to Yahwēh is characteristic of the conception of the divine authority of the ‘King of Kings’ represented by Cyrus in contrast with Cambyeses, a fact noticed in the Egyptian source, Pseudo-Callisthenes, in connection with Alexander the Great, and endorsed by Josephus in his—probably apocryphal—story of Alexander’s *proskynēsis* before the High Priest.<sup>21</sup>

The most important western offshoot of this tradition, however, is the *Īsa-nāmah*—or Jesus Saga—of which the Gospels are offshoots. The Fourth Gospel, in form and content, belongs definitely to the category and family of which Firdausī’s *Shāhnāmah* is the most illustrious collection. The saga behind the Synoptic Gospels is clearly an offshoot of the form of Cyrus biography and the *Zartušt-nāma*. The revelation of the Glory before birth, at the baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration and at the Tomb on the Third Morning, combined with the tongues of *flame* descending on the *diadochoi* (*khulafā*) of the Kingdom represent the fundamental element of the Epic form of the *Shāhnāmah*.<sup>22</sup> In addition, we have the varied forms of the attacks of Ahrimān, claiming to control the Glory and to have it in his gift,<sup>23</sup> or, indirectly, through Azī Dahhāk (Astyages) represented by the Edomite Herod or the *Rūmī* Pontius Pilate or the Herodians who combined both the *Tūrānī* and *Rūmī* positions.<sup>24</sup> More striking still are the shepherd and Magi, in their recognition of His possession of the Kayan Glory, at a time when according to Persian tradition—also illustrated by Firdausī’s cavalier treatment of the Arsacids—the Glory lay hid.<sup>25</sup> The story of the Gospels turns on the attempt to annex ‘the Glory that cannot be forcibly seized,’ and Jesus the

<sup>21</sup> For the suffering Servant *motif* in the *Shāhnāmah* see the account of *Sīyawūsh*, *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), II, 191 ff.; the Jewish assignment of Cyrus’ Kingship to Yahwēh (Is. 41); for the episode of Alexander the Great and the High Priest v. Josephus, *Antiq.*, XI, 8, 5.

<sup>22</sup> V. my paper *Regnum et Ecclesia*, particularly pp. 33 ff.

<sup>23</sup> E. g. the Temptations (Lk. IV, 5-7), cf. *Zamyād Yast*, VII, 34 ff.; IX, 57-64, *S. B. E.*, XXIII, 293 ff., 300 ff.).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Zamyād Yast*, IX, 61 ff., XII-XIII.

<sup>25</sup> *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), VI, 210 ff., cf. pp. 193 ff.

Christ is portrayed as one who is wiser than Jamshīd. The wisdom, royal *dikaaiosunē*, the organic nature of the Kingdom, delegation of powers and the royal feast and the *anabasis* against the enemy all appear, while in the death on the Cross, we have a suggestion of Afrasiyāb's capture and murder of the King's son Siyawūsh, from whom came the Glory to Kai Khushrau.<sup>26</sup> If this kinship is once recognized, it will be seen that in the Alexander Biographies of the West—the *Sikandarnāmah*—in the lives of Cyrus (the Great and the Younger)—the works of Dio Cassius, the historian, and the Augustan histories, but particularly in the Gospels, we have a Western branch of the tradition whose Eastern branch is represented by Firdausi's *Shāhnāmah*. This fact is of the utmost importance for, together with the *Book of Daniel*, which is the *Zamyād Yast* of Hebrew literature, the literature here indicated attests the continuity of the Kingly tradition and Kingly Glory, through the Arsacid period, when it was transmitted from the Kayan Sāsān to Ardashīr by the *arthavans* of Persepolis.<sup>27</sup> For the Christian scholar, it transforms Firdausi's *Shāhnāmah*, from a remote Oriental Epic into a first hand commentary on the Gospels, despite the millennium which separates their *Shāh* from the Epic of the Kayan *Shāhs*. It also serves to explain—as the modern *Formgeschichte* theories fail to do—the *form* of the Christus-saga and its derivatives—the Four Gospels. It assigns to Marcion of Pontus, whose Kings claimed descent from Cyrus and Darius, his proper place in Church History and transforms his 'Gospel' from a mangled version of Saint Luke to a book of the *Shāh-Īsa-nāmah* opening with the descent of the Kayan Glory, while the Gnostics culminating in Manes represents a Magician or Zoroastrian attempt to assess the theme in terms of the theology of Persia. There we must leave the western offshoot of the Royal Genealogy consummated in the *Shāhnāmah*, and turn East again.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For the conception of organic unity and function underlying the theory of Eastern Kingship v. my paper "The Oriental Despot," *Ang. Theol. Rev.*, X, (1928), 238-249; for a further example v. my note, "The Human *Khil'at*," *The Near East and India*, XXXIV (1928), 269-270. Since these papers were published, R. Otto has reached the same conclusion, apparently independently, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn* (Munich, 1934), pp. 9 ff., 74 ff. For the fight against the enemy (Ahrimān or Azī Dahhāk), v. my paper, "The Meaning of the Cross," *Ang. Theol. Rev.*, XII (1930), pp. 411-422 and "Regnum et Ecclesia," p. 31, n. 52.

<sup>27</sup> V. *supra*, nn. 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> "Regnum et Ecclesia," p. 20, n. 19.

Further East, in Bāghdād, the Muslim Babylon, there is a similar movement visible under 'Abbāsīd rule. The 'Abbāsīds had succeeded in overthrowing the Umayyads by means of Persian support, and their dynasty marks the beginning of the wholesale introduction of Persian officers and institutions into the Caliphate.<sup>29</sup> But, the party (*shī'at*) of 'Alī was destined to fare no better than under the preceding dynasty, for when once the 'Abbāsīds had gained their end, they proceeded to repress both the *Shī'ah* and the Persian. The downfall of the Barmakids under Hārūnu'l-Rashīd can be regarded as the final act of this line of policy.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the 'Abbāsīds were ready to adopt the same basis of oecumenical authority as that which runs through Hebrew tradition from Cyrus to Jesus of Nazareth, and to annex the Kayan Glory, by virtue of their conquest of Elam. Our evidence for this policy is found in 'Alī Ṭabari's *The Book of Religion and Empire*, written at the command and with the assistance of the Caliph Mutawakkil (847-861 A. D.).<sup>31</sup> In this work the claims of past heroes from Cyrus to Alexander and beyond are examined, but in every case the words of the Hebrew Prophet point 'without doubt' to 'the kingdom of the Arabs' 'and more especially to this 'Abbāsīd Kingdom.'<sup>32</sup> The work, in fact, is the 'Abbāsīd counterpart of the *Book of Daniel*, and it annexes to Bāghdād, the Glory of Babylon in the same manner and by the very words used by the Hebrew Prophets to annex it to Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup> This work was written probably in 855, eighty years before the birth of Firdausī, on the eve of the overthrow of Mutawakkil, whose fate, in the eyes of Persian, Jew and Christian, must have resembled that of Belshazzar.<sup>34</sup> The time was ripe for the fulfilment of the words of the Prophet Muhammad concerning Hasan the son of 'Alī "This my son is a *Sayyid* and God will reconcile through him two Muslim parties."<sup>35</sup>

In 839 at Āmul was born the historian Al-Ṭabari, who lived until 923 A. D. His work *Ta'rīkh al-Rusūl wa'l-mulūk* was trans-

<sup>29</sup> V. my *Hārūnu'l-Rashīd and Charles the Great* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), p. 17, and n. 1.

<sup>30</sup> E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-261.

<sup>31</sup> Alī Ṭabari, *Kitābu'l-Dīn wa'l-Daulat*, ed. A. Mingana (Manchester, 1923), and translated by him under the title *The Book of Religion and Empire* (Manchester, 1922).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Tr., pp. 45-46, 137-138.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. ix ff.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

lated into Persian in 963 by order of the Sāmānid *wazīr* Abū 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bal'amī, and supplemented considerably in the earlier period. The part of the Arabic work dealing with the Sāsānid period was translated into German in 1879 by Noeldeke.<sup>36</sup> This work, in its Persian form, was either one of Firdausī's sources or derived from the same sources, particularly the Persian *Khudaināma* or *Book of the Kings*. The significance of the work lies in the fact that the historian Ṭabarī gave to the Muslim world the historical vindication of the Sāsānids and their predecessors, which is the counterpart of the theological and apologetic vindication of the 'Abbāsids by the other Ṭabarī. In the writings of his younger contemporary, Ma'sūdī, who died in 956 A. D. after a life spent in travel, we find the same attention paid to the Sāsānids, and a notice of the literary activity, in the *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*, summarizes the literary activity of Persian national writers in 956 A. D., when Firdausī was thirty years of age.<sup>37</sup>

The Persians have a book entitled *Kuhān Nāmāh*, in which are related all the dignitaries of the Persian monarchy, to the number of six hundred, classified according to the rank that has been assigned to them. This book is part of the *'Ain Nāmāh*, which is a book of (administrative) regulations. It is a volume comprising several thousand pages and complete copies can only be found with the *Mūbād* and other persons invested with some degree of authority. . . . Those occupied with the history of the Kings and the peoples differ in opinion on the origin of the Persians, the names of their Kings and the length of their reigns. We furnish the traditions of the Persians themselves and neglect the information given by other peoples—Israelites, ancient and modern Greeks, since the opinions which they follow are contrary to Persian tradition. It is, indeed, fairer to follow the Persians in this matter, when the distance of time and the multiplicity of events have weakened their traditions, caused the memory of their glories to fail and their institutions to perish.

Ma'sūdī proceeds to indicate the glories of ancient Persia, stating that he had seen at *Istakhr*, in 916 A. D. a great book contain-

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<sup>36</sup> Under the title *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, Leyden, 1879. For details v. pp. xiii-xxviii. This work alone, together with its Persian translation is sufficient evidence of the interest in Ancient Persian Kingship at the time when Firdausī took over the task of Daqīqī (c. 976), v. pp. xxiii ff.

<sup>37</sup> Ma'sūdī, *Kitābu'l-Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (*Bibl. Geog. Arab*, VIII), Leyden 1893, translated under the title *Le Livre d'Avvertissement*, pp. 149 f.

ing the lives of the Kings of Persia, their reigns, the accounts of their buildings, and other details, which he had been unable to discover either in the *Khudaināmah*, the *‘Ainnāmah*, the *Kuhān-nāmah* or any other work. It contained portraits of the Sāsānids, twenty-five men and two women, and with each portrait was the biography of the monarch, both of his public and private life, based on documents recovered from the treasure of the Persian Kings. The work was completed in 722 A. D. and translated from Pahlavi into Arabic for the *Khalīfah* Hishām.<sup>38</sup>

Ma’sūdī, then, gives us both a contemporary statement and a convenient summary of the state of knowledge and the authorities available for the use of Firdausī and his younger contemporary Al-Tha’alibī, whose monumental work *Ghurār al-Siyār* is the Arabic, prose counterpart of the *Shāhnāmah*.<sup>39</sup> (The portion referring to the Kings of Persia has been edited and translated into French by Zotenberg, the translator of the Persian Tabarī.) It is probable that Al-Tha’alibī and Firdausī both died in or about the year 1021 A. D.,<sup>40</sup> and, with this notice of him and of the Baghdādī Ma’sūdī, as the Arabic representatives, respectively, of the Irāqī and Persian strands of Persian traditions, we must pass from the setting of Firdausī’s life to his work. It may, however be pertinent to remark, that Al-Tha’alibī frequently gives the sources used by Firdausī with a greater degree of accuracy than Tabarī.<sup>41</sup>

The problems of chronology and myth which beset the content of the *Shāhnāmah* have invaded the story of the life of its Poet, and, however great is the implicit testimony of Persia’s appreciation of Firdausī, it is equally disconcerting to any attempt to determine the main points of his life. It is, however, not necessary here to enter into any detail.

When Firdausī was about forty years of age, the Persian poet Daqīqī was assassinated by one of his slaves. The date is uncertain, and the possibilities range from 952 A. D. (Huart) to 976 A. D. (Warner). Huart’s date is certainly too early, as it is not easily reconciled with the date of the *Shāhnāmah* and its dedica-

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151 ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Histoire des Rois des Perses*, par Al-Thā’alibī, texte arabe publié et traduit par H. Zotenberg, Paris, 1900.

<sup>40</sup> *Enc. Islam*, s. v. ath-Thā’alibī. Zotenberg in his Preface confuses two entirely different persons named Thā’alibī.

<sup>41</sup> *Enc. Islam*, loc. cit.; v. Zotenberg’s introduction, pp. xviii-xliv.



tion, after thirty five years' work, to Maḥmūd, whose accession took place in 997 A. D., and on the whole a date between 970 and 976 A. D. is preferable.<sup>42</sup> Daqīqī was, like Firdausī a native of Tūs, which is in the region of the southern coast of the Sea of Qazwīn (the Caspian Sea). This region was, so to speak, an asylum and refuge of Persian nationality from the Arab advance. Four centuries later, after the death of Tīmūr, it was from Gīlān near by, that the Ṣafawī house started on its victorious career, which led to the establishment of the *Shī'ah* form of Islām as the national faith of Persia.<sup>43</sup>

The records of the Sāsānid House, according to the preface to the *Shāhnāmah* written by Baisinghar, the grandson of Tīmūr, were captured by the Arabs and a translation of part of them was submitted to 'Umar, who by no means approved of their contents. From Arabia they went to Abyssinia, where by order of King Jasha they were translated. The contents became known in India, whence they were brought by Ya'qūb Lais, who commanded Abū Mansūr to transcribe in Persian, what a learned (*dānishwar*) *dihkān* had written in Pahlavī, and to complete the record to the death of Yazdagird III (652-3 A. D.). Abū Mansūr transmitted the task to Su'ūd, who with four others carried it to its completion. The advent of the Sāmānids, at the end of the ninth century brought encouragement to the work, as they claimed Sāsānid descent, and Nūh II (976-997) commissioned Daqīqī to put the records into Persian verse. He had written a thousand lines when he was assassinated.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant to notice that Firdausī, like Daqīqī and the others who participated in the work, were *dihkāns*—landed proprietors, or perhaps better, members of 'county families,' whose ancestry went back to Sāsānid times and even beyond. Furthermore, the preliminary work, which preceded Firdausi's epic and rendered it possible, reflects the persistence of the Zoroastrian faith and traditions. The term *Shāhnāmah*, with its kindred terms *Bastānnāmah*, *Khudaināmah*, *Kuhannāmah*, appears to have acquired the technical significance, on which Firdausi's work set the

<sup>42</sup> E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, I, 459-462.

<sup>43</sup> V. M. Nāzim, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 f.

<sup>44</sup> *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), I, 67 f.; cf. E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, I, 461, the stanza opening "O King, recalling Dara's noble line."

seal. The prevailing Sāsānid atmosphere accounts for many of Firdausī's troubles and for the assumption that Daqīqī himself was a Zoroastrian, as is certainly suggested by Daqīqī's own lines:

"Of all of this world's good and ill  
Four things Dakikī chooseth still—  
Girl's ruby lips, the sound of lyre,  
The blood-red wine, the Faith of Fire."<sup>45</sup>

But the most important consequence is the parallel between Persian and Jewish history, that this situation produces. The kinship of the Jewish Messianic hope with Cyrus the Great is by no means wholly dependent on the Return. The Kayan House of Elam is the oriental counterpart of the Davidic House of Jerusalem, and both are agreed in their antagonism to the political control of Babylon.<sup>46</sup> Bāghdād was the 'Arab Babylon, and the motive, which prompted the Hebrew Prophet to write 'Bel stoopeth, Nebo boweth down' reappears in the Persian Poet to extol the royal pantheon of Zoroastrian Persia and the rights of 'Alī against the Babylonish usurpations of 'Umar and the House of 'Abbās. David and Solomon are replaced by Ardashīr (who was crowned in Bāghdād!), and Nushīrwan, and in the victorious Maḥmūd, the shoot of Yazdagird's rod, is revealed a Persian Messiah.<sup>47</sup>

Maḥmūd's accession in 997 A. D. and his recognition of Firdausī both fall far too late for the occasion and inception of the work. Indeed, both Firdausī and his generation, as well as subsequent generations, have been disposed to assign to the son of Subuktigīn a greater share of the glory than is his due, for it was Subuktigīn who laid the foundations of Maḥmūd's success. He was, moreover, the contemporary of Firdausī, being born in 942 A. D. and ascending the throne of Ghazna in 977 A. D., the year after the death of Daqīqī. Subuktigīn's reign supplied all the necessary elements of the Great King, including the victories over the King of Hind, Jaipal. Maḥmūd merely completed the edifice by the overthrow of the Sāmānids in 999 A. D. and the subjugation of

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<sup>45</sup> *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> The historical parallel can be carried farther, and I suggest that the thought underlying the rise of the Messianic Hope is that if Anshān could produce a Cyrus to force Bel to stoop, then why should not Jerusalem or Juda?

<sup>47</sup> V. particularly *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), VI, 207-9.

Northern India as far as Somnāth, whereby he became Lord of Hind.<sup>48</sup> The recognition of Maḥmūd by the 'Abbāsīd *Khalīfah*, whereby Maḥmūd received the title of the Right Arm of the Faith and the State, naturally evokes no response from Firdausi to whom Maḥmūd is the King of Kings, and the possession of Bāghdād by the House of 'Abbās is an usurpation of the city of the House of Ardashīr.<sup>49</sup>

It is not only over Hind that the Conqueror of the Two Worlds must rule but over Rūm. Here Persian royal tradition takes its most notable departure from Avestan tradition, which regards Sikandar Rūmī (Alexander the Great) as possessed of the divinity of Ahrimān.<sup>50</sup> The Persian tradition follows the Egyptian suggestion in Pseudo-Callisthenes and transforms Alexander's ancestry from Greek to Persian, Darab—a purely fictitious King—being his true father, Philip his foster-father and Darius Codomannus his younger, usurping brother. So Alexander is incorporated into the Kayan royal Pantheon.<sup>51</sup> Caesar is descended from Salm, the son of Farīdūn, and so he has a status in the divine Kingship, but Firdausi leaves no doubt that it is a vassal status. It is fitting that the Persians rule the Greeks, is the Kayan reply to Euripides, for the Persian King is Lord of the World, and the Great King relinquishes no claim to overlordship that he has ever exercised.<sup>52</sup> This position in Firdausi and the nation he represents is not a matter of political science or diplomatic theory, but a matter of fact and religion. It is clearly stated in praise of Maḥmūd,

"Tis the king of Rūm and Ind,  
King from Kannūj e'en to the river Sind,  
While in Tūrān and in Irān men give

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the poem in praise of Sultan Maḥmūd, particularly *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), I, 113.

<sup>49</sup> *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), VI, 258.

<sup>50</sup> *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), I, 59-62 where full references will be found.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 55; VI, 11-19, 29 ff.

<sup>52</sup> Salm was the eldest son of Farīdūn (*Firdausi*, Tr. W., I, 187-8); he conspired with Tūr (*ibid.*, 190 f.) after receiving the governorship of Rūm and the West. Therefore, from the beginning, Rūm was part of the territory of the Great King, and the defeat of Salm by Minūchihr (*ibid.*, 220-229), falling as it does in the Pishdadian period, fixes the assumption as a theological and historical ultimate, in the eyes of the Poet; cf. the advice of Lichas to the Spartans, *Thuc.*, VIII, 43, 3-4.

As slaves obedience to his will and live  
 Thereby. With justice decked he earth and now,  
 That done, hath set the crown upon his brow."<sup>53</sup>

Firdausī is first and last the Poet of the Kayan Glory or Grace—the *farr* or *hvarēnō kavaēm*, of which the possession marks the Great King and constitutes his right to rule. The determination of the right and the possession rests with the Magi,<sup>54</sup> for, while others may possess its mark, it is only in the King that it abides in all completeness with its attributes of wisdom, bravery, and justice. It is 'the Glory that cannot be forcibly seized'; it is likewise the Glory that cannot be hid. Turānī maternity does not obscure it,<sup>55</sup> and Azī Dahhāk is he who strives to gain it by force, whether he be Turk or 'Arab matters not.'<sup>56</sup> History and legend alike ascribe to Nushīrwān—the Sāsānian who outdid the achievements of Alexander the Great—the virtue of not attempting 'to seize the Glory that cannot be forcibly seized,' and his brother, who made the fatal error, was set aside by the Magi.<sup>57</sup> It is the struggle for the possession of the Glory and the detection of its divine presence or its elusiveness on which turns the form of each biography from the Pishdādians down to Yazdagird III.<sup>58</sup> Firdausī's task is to show its continuous incarnation throughout the ages in a royal pantheon, differing from Avestan and post Avestan tradition only in the inclusion of Alexander the Great. The argument implicit in the Epic is that the Glory is eternal and that from age to age it will manifest itself. Even in the dark periods of Turanian triumph, it merely lies concealed, and that it will reappear as it does in Maḥmūd.

The King of Turan—the Enemy—maintains all the outward appearance of its possession, and his benighted followers believe that he is its possessor—as did Pīrān, the faithful follower of

<sup>53</sup> *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), I, 113.

<sup>54</sup> It is impossible to give references to a word which occurs on almost every page. For the right of the Magi to judge the rightful possession of the Glory, cf. Hdt. I, 107; Mt. II, v. also *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), II, 372; cf. I, 60 ff., n. 57 *infra*, and Heb. *kavōd yahwēh*.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. Kai Khushrau, *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), II, 363-372.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *S. B. E.*, XXIII, 297 ff.

<sup>57</sup> G. Rawlinson, *The Seventh Monarchy*, pp. 379 ff.

<sup>58</sup> V. E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, II, 142-144; cf. I, 140-150.

Afrasiyāb, and the house of 'Abbās<sup>59</sup>—but, in that, they are led astray for its home is in the Kayan house. This fact, however, is of considerable importance as it provides a link between the *Shāhnāmah* and the literature on the theory of the Caliphate. Firdausi's *Shāhnāmah* supplies the necessary introduction to the work of his younger contemporary Māwardī. The *al-Ahkāmū'l-Sultāniyyah* is a constitutional treatise of the overt working of the theory of monarchy described in heroic strain by Firdausi. As an instance of their proximity may be cited the automatic disqualification of anyone announcing himself to be the *Khalīfah* and so attempting 'to seize the Glory that cannot be forcibly seized.' Their difference appears most strikingly in the stress on the Succession of the Prophet (*Khilāfatū' Rasūli-llāhi*) in Māwardī, at the expense of the eternal presence of divine vicegerency (*Khilāfatū'llāh*) in Firdausi. It is the difference of the 'Arab and the Persian.<sup>60</sup>

Our last task is to show briefly the process by which the *Shāhnāmah* became the foundation on which future Muslim Kings were to base their right to rule. The custom of writing and retaining the records of the reign was maintained at all courts. It was the duty of the *waqī'a-navīsī*, whose work was simply that of compiling the *ephemerides* of the reign. The duty of putting these records into literary form was assigned to a writer of standing. At the Ottoman court in the sixteenth century, there was a series of these writers who held the title of *Shāhnāmajī*. Their works were called, variously, a *Shāhnāmah*, a *Fatīhnāmah*, or *Zafarnāmah*. Frequently the name of the sovereign was prefixed to the book particularly that of Alexander the Great, the *Sikandarnāmah* or *Iskandarnāmah*.<sup>61</sup> In most cases there was an appeal, by means of a genealogy, to high antiquity and distinguished ancestry. Both poetry and prose were used to set forth the record. These epics were not infrequently avowed continuations of Firdausi. They were all indebted to him for their language and metre, for the *Shāhnāmah* had, so to speak, established the technique of correct epic writing.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Giv's remarks to the faithful Pīrān. *Firdausi* (Tr. W.), II, 383-4.

<sup>60</sup> *Enc. Islam*, II, s. v. *Khalīfa*.

<sup>61</sup> H. Ethé, *ap.* (*Grundr. Ir. Phil.*), II, 236-7.

<sup>62</sup> E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, III, 95 ff.; cf. *supra*, n. 7; *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*, II, 178 ff. (Noeldeke), 233-239 (Ethé).

The most interesting fact of all, however, is seen in their relation to the political exigencies of the period in which they appear. We have seen already that there is, in Firdausī's *Shāhnāmāh*, a definite political *motif*—the re-instatement of the Persian King as the King of Kings, without reference to Muslim authority—particularly the authority of the 'Abbāsīd *Khalīfah* at Bāghdād. The *Shāhnāmāh* and its descendants became the regular form in which such assertions of sovereign rights were stated. It is neither possible nor necessary here to quote the *catena*, and a few examples must suffice. Hamdu'llāh Mustaufī's *Zafarnāmāh* (c. 1334 A. D.) forms the link between Firdausī and Sharafu'l-Dīn Yazdī's *Zafarnāmāh* or *Iskandarnāmāh-i-Tīmūrī*. The force of the allusion to Alexander was the declaration of overlordship over the Ottoman (*Rūmī*) Turks. From the *Zafarnāmāh* spring the Tīmūrīd works by which the descendants of Bābur, particularly Akbar (1556-1605 A. D.), declared their independence alike of Ottoman Turk and Ṣafawī Persian. Of these works, Abū'l-Faẓl's *Akbarnāmāh* is the most important, as, together with the *Tarīkhī Alfī*, it gives to Akbar's reign the significance of the millennium achieved.<sup>63</sup> At the same time the Ṣafawī poets produced their *Shāhnāmāh*, *Ismā'īlnāmāh*, *Shāhanshāhnāmāh*. To continue this enumeration would be but to weary my audience with a series of names,<sup>64</sup> nevertheless there are two works, written just over a century ago and belonging to the same *literary* category, which cannot be omitted here—the *Jirjis-i Razm* of Safdar 'Alī Shāh Munsif and the *Jarjnāmāh* of Firūz ibn Kā'us (1814-1837 A. D.)—the latter a work of forty thousand couplets, in praise of the Four Georges!<sup>65</sup>

In conclusion, it must be noticed that, with the exception of the Mongol Kings, who base their right to rule on equalling or excelling the achievements of Alexander the Great—the significance of the title *Iskandarnāmāh*—the claim of the *Shāhnāmāh* and its kindred works is that the hero possesses by virtue of his birth and ancestry the *farr* or the Kayan Glory, whose mark is on his body.<sup>66</sup> It sets out the unity of the body regal from Jamshīd and Farīdūn

<sup>63</sup> E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, III, 95 ff.; *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*, II, 237; 'Abdu'l-Ghanī, *op. cit.*, III, 243 ff. and *supra*, n. 7.

<sup>64</sup> For a full list v. *Grundr. Ir. Phil.*, II, 235-237.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>66</sup> *Firdausī* (Tr. W.), II, 373.

to the King who is the writer's hero. Firdausī's *Shāhnāmāh* laid the foundation on which his successors built, and provided the means whereby Muslim monarchy could exist independent of 'Umar's choice of the succession (*Khilāfat*), by resting its claim on the right of 'Umar's contemporary Yazdagird III and the divine *Khilāfat* inherent in the Kayan and Sāsānid monarchies. It is this development which accounts for the tendency of the term, (and the view inherent in the term), *Khālifatu'llāh* to supersede the term *Khālifatu Rasūli'llāhi* in political prestige, particularly after the assumption of the rôle of Leader of the Faithful by the Ottoman Sultān in virtue of his possession of the Twin Shrines. From the eighteenth century onwards, moreover, the situation in the Muslim world has been marked by the steady advance of Azī Dahhāk and the forces of Tūrān, in the north, from the expansion of Russia, in the south, from the extension of the power of the East India Companies. In 1857, Bahādur Shāh II, unmindful of his Pishdādian predecessor, committed the folly of attempting 'to seize the Glory that cannot be forcibly seized,' and

"Pressed by the world's new lord  
He fled, surrendering crown, throne and treasure,  
Host, power and diadem. The world turned black  
To him, he disappeared and yielded all."<sup>67</sup>

Sixty years later, Persia faced her revolution, which was the result of the combined attack of the Azī Dahhāk of Western mercantile companies and the Azī Dahhāk of the North—Russia. The consequence of the Revolution, the War and the great Turanian menace of the North was the deposition of the last Qājār and the elevation of Ridha Pahlavī Shāh to the *maṣnad* in 1926. Both the title he has assumed and his *farmān* ordering the Firdausī celebrations mark an appeal to Persia's past as the means of restoring the Kāyan Glory to its native throne.

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<sup>67</sup> Firdausī (Tr. W.), I, 140.

## MAIMONIDES AND SPINOZA ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

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IN NOVEMBER 1932 the tercentennial anniversary of the birth of Spinoza was celebrated throughout the civilized world. In March and April of the present year the octocentenary of Moses Maimonides will be celebrated wherever there are Jews interested in their past.

Spinoza was born a Jew, but unfortunately was excommunicated by the Synagogue because of his independence and freedom of speech. His was an age when theological controversies were taken seriously, and the Jewish community of Amsterdam was even more sensitive than the native Dutch because they were recent immigrants from Spain and Portugal, did not yet feel completely at home in Holland and no doubt feared the consequences of theological odium should it become publicly known that a non-conformist like the young Spinoza, was tolerated in their midst. His exclusion from the society of his own people must have made a great impression upon the sensitive youth which was deep and lasting and contributed to the solitariness of this great thinker whose unpopular ideas must have made his life a lonely one under any circumstances. The few friends he did have were Christians, and Spinoza, always so gentle and unruffled, betrays a trace of bitterness when he speaks of the Jews who had treated him so badly.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza is the Olympian who envisages eternity, and religion, race and nation are treated as non-existent. Geometry is universal and Spinoza treats of reality and truth *more geometrico*, as befits a philosopher.

In the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he is concerned with the concrete problem of political freedom. He urges that freedom of thought and expression is not merely not incompatible with public peace and loyalty, but that it can not be suppressed without suppressing peace and loyalty itself. He is speaking here of a subject very near to his heart as a man and not merely as an abstract philosopher. He had suffered and was suffering in his own person from political and religious intolerance. In this work therefore we



find the human side of Spinoza coming out a little more clearly, and we are surprised by the strange phenomenon that while he is dealing in detail with the Old Testament and very cursorily with the New, for as a Jew he had been brought up on the Old Testament and had mastered Hebrew, the language in which it was originally written,—we are met, I say, with the strange phenomenon, that while he writes as only a Jew steeped in Jewish literature can write of the Old Testament, his references to the ancient Hebrews and the Jews breathe a certain aloofness as if he was not one of them, and he does not spare them in his attacks. It grates a little because it seems somewhat untrue to the traditional picture of Spinoza as being always equable and affable and cheerful and never saying an unkind word about anybody. At the same time it is understandable and at the same time gratifying, because it shows that Spinoza was human after all.

Maimonides, on the other hand, had never been disowned by his people despite the fact that he too offended the fundamentalists of his day. But he lived in a different age. The Mohammedans in Spain in the twelfth century until the coming of the Almohades were liberal. Science and Philosophy were respected and cultivated with diligence. Moreover, Maimonides did not publish his philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, until he was an old man and had become distinguished as the greatest rabbinical authority of his time. Much could be forgiven the “great luminary of the exile,” who was trying to help the perplexed of his day to solve their perplexities and remain loyal to the teachings of Judaism.

A comparison of these two men as interpreters of holy writ is therefore both timely and instructive.

Unlike other books, the Old Testament, as soon as the canon was closed assumed a unique position among the Jews. It was the word and the law of God revealed to Moses and the prophets. It was complete and perfect, nothing could be added to it or taken away. As the Jews lost their state and were dispersed among the nations, the only thing that held them together was this book, as they refused to be lost in their dispersion. Hence it was necessary for them to draw their intellectual and spiritual sustenance from the Bible. This involved the interpretation of the book, particularly of its laws, so as to adopt them to new conditions of life.

This phenomenon is not unique so far as law is concerned. The Romans had an analogous experience with the law of the XII

Tables, which was called by Livy (III, 34, 7) "*fons omnis publici privatique iuris*," although in Justinian's time nothing was left of the original legislation. The difference, however, is that the Romans had their own state and were free to make new laws whenever they chose. Moreover they had already made a distinction between *ius* and *fas*, human law and divine, i. e., law concerning human relations and ceremonial law having to do with man's relation to the gods. As the Jews, however, lost their state, they became a Church and the Church absorbed all law, human as well as divine.

The first stage of biblical interpretation is to be found in the Mishna and the Gemara or in the Talmud and the Midrashim. It is for the most part an interpretation of the civil and ritual law of the Pentateuch. It corresponds to what is called the *Interpretatio* in Roman law, the extension of the law of the XII tables by means of fictions. The only difference is that the fictitious character of the rabbinical interpretation is more drastic, owing to the fact that in post-Biblical times the Jews had no legislative body and hence had to make interpretation do the work of legislation.

Thus the first stage or period of Jewish interpretation of the Bible was principally legalistic (including the ceremonial law) and was mostly concerned with the Pentateuchal codes. As thus interpreted the Pentateuchal law, in theory, embraced the whole life of the Jew, his relations to his fellow Jews and his relations to his God in the broadest sense. The literary products of this interpretation are to be found in the two monuments of rabbinical Judaism, the Mishna (ab. 200 A. D.) and the Gemara or Talmud (Babylonian and Palestinian—ab. 500 A. D.), as well as the Midrashim (of different dates). These became authoritative, and formed the bases of the various codifications from Jehudai Gaon (760) to Joseph Caro (16th century).

In the Alexandrian period, during the first two centuries B. C., when the Jews were under Greek rule, they acquired new interests. Living in a hellenistic atmosphere they absorbed something of the scientific and philosophic ideas of their political masters, which broadened their outlook. Once more they found the Biblical writings in need of interpretation, but of a different kind. Hence it was not only the legal codes, but even more so the narrative portions of the Pentateuch, which were subjected to interpretation,

and by introducing the allegorical method, they were able to find in the Pentateuch not merely practical teachings but also theoretical, such as they found in Platonism and Stoicism. This kind of interpretation can be seen in the work of Philo (b. ab. 25 B. C.).

So far as the literary documents are concerned, the Alexandrian literature seems to antedate the Palestinian and the Babylonian, but there is no doubt that legalistic interpretation was carried on a long time before it was put down in definitive literary form. Moreover the Alexandrian movement came to an end shortly after the days of Philo, and its medieval analogue did not begin until about the ninth century.

In the early middle ages the mantle of the Greeks, whose philosophical schools were closed by Emperor Justinian in 529, fell upon the Arabs. To be sure, the Nestorian and Jacobite Christians in Syria and Mesopotamia founded theological schools in the fourth century in which Greek science and philosophy were also cultivated, but they did not carry these activities very far, and their importance in this respect is rather that of mediators between the Greeks and the Arabs. The latter owed their first knowledge of Greek science and philosophy to the Syrian Christians whom they employed as translators. The Arabs, then, were the real successors of the Greeks and, as is well known, cultivated philosophy and the sciences very seriously from the 8th to the 12th centuries.

The Jews followed in the wake of the Arabs and like them, both in the East and in Spain, devoted a great deal of their energies to science and philosophy. Again the Bible perforce had to be subjected to another effort of interpretation, for as the word of God and the sole expression thereof it must contain all that is found to be true regarding God, the universe and the soul of man, in short all those matters which a cultivated Jew in those days found important for a complete life.

Maimonides was the greatest exponent of this movement. He did not, so far as we know, write a commentary on the Bible, but in his *Guide of the Perplexed* we find a good deal of interpretation of biblical texts and, what is more important, a complete theory of interpretation.

He tells us in the Introduction why he called his book the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The Perplexed are those persons who are devout students of the Bible and believers in the truth of its teachings,

who have also familiarized themselves with the science of the philosophers and find discrepancies between the two. They are confronted with two alternatives. They must either accept the biblical statements and reject the conclusions of reason as taught by the philosophers, or they accept the teachings of reason and reject the statements of the Bible. As rational beings and believers in the Bible, they can not do either, hence their perplexity. And Maimonides undertakes to guide these persons in their difficulty.

His theory is as follows: There can be no disagreement between reason and revelation, for truth is one; rational truth and revealed truth must coincide. Philosophy is rational truth, the Bible is revealed truth. Not everything taught by a philosopher is necessarily true, but the teachings of philosophy are true. As to the Bible, everything in it is true, but one must understand what it says. If a given interpretation clashes with reason, that alone is proof that the interpretation is wrong. If you ask: But why was the Bible written so obscurely that the ordinary reader can not understand it? Was it not intended precisely for the ordinary reader? If you ask this question, Maimonides's answer is: Yes, the Bible was written for all kinds of readers. It was written for the wise and the simple, for the young and the old. And precisely because it was intended to be some things to all men, it is in need of interpretation.

The source of error may be twofold, one may fail to understand the import of a biblical passage or one may misunderstand it and gather an erroneous doctrine. The first is not serious. The Bible contains certain doctrines which an untrained person can not understand either because he has not the preliminary knowledge which requires years of steady application to obtain, or he may by reason of his inherent intellectual weakness be unable to grasp profound metaphysical concepts. In a case like this he can see only the surface meaning of the biblical text and that is enough for him. Every one is not bound to be a philosopher.

However, there are certain passages in the Bible which if one understands literally he will have an erroneous conception of God. These are the anthropomorphic expressions of which the Bible is full, and to think of God as corporeal in form or endowed with faculties and emotions akin to those of man is a very serious error and tantamount to idolatry. It is not incumbent upon every man, woman and child to be able to prove scientifically the exis-

tence, unity and incorporeality of God, but if one believes that God is multiple or corporeal, he is guilty of a serious offence, which may exclude him from the community of Israel.

Accordingly Maimonides undertakes to enlighten the sophisticated reader for whom his work is intended on both these aspects of biblical interpretation. So far as the anthropomorphic expressions are concerned, he says that they are to be understood as metaphors. Hand of God, mouth of God, feet of God, face of God, etc., are expressions intended for the simple reader, to whom the reality and activity of God can not be brought home in any other way. With respect to the esoteric part of biblical doctrine, Maimonides identifies it with the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle and interprets the creation story in Genesis in the sense of Aristotle's physics, and the first chapter of Ezekiel describing the divine chariot as an allegory teaching doctrines of metaphysics akin to those of Aristotle.

Maimonides's theory of biblical interpretation is not incompatible with the traditional rabbinical interpretation, for in the first place the passages which lend themselves to metaphysical interpretation are not the laws but the narratives, and secondly, Maimonides does not deny the historical truth of the narratives, he merely superposes the deeper philosophical interpretation upon the literal. It is only in reference to the anthropomorphic expressions that he rejects entirely the literal interpretation.

His standard of interpretation is, as can easily be seen, an external one, the one of rational truth. The assumption—an *a priori* assumption—is that the Bible must accord with reason, i. e., with what Maimonides was convinced was the teaching of true science and philosophy. Any apparent discrepancy must therefore be explained away by interpretation. And this was bound to lead to all sorts of artificial devices.

Textual criticism did not exist in Maimonides's day. The variants in the Masoretic text were regarded as genuine and original and there was no study of the Greek version, as Greek was an unknown language to Maimonides and his Jewish contemporaries. The Aramaic version of Onkelos was carefully considered. Maimonides, in fact, refers to it in support of his interpretation of the anthropomorphic passages, but the genuineness and accuracy of the Masoretic text were never doubted.

Inconsistencies in the Bible itself did not escape Maimonides or his rabbinic predecessors, the sages of the Talmud, but with the exception of a lone figure, Hivi al Balki, a contemporary of Saadia (9th century), all smoothed them over by interpretation. The unity of the Pentateuch was never doubted for a moment, nor was the Mosaic authorship. The last twelve verses of Deuteronomy recording the death and burial of Moses did indeed seem incompatible with Moses's authorship of every single word in the Pentateuch, as the Talmud had already noted, and one Rabbi said that those verses must have been added by Joshua, while another Rabbi would not concede even this much and found satisfaction in the theory that God dictated those verses to Moses as he dictated all the rest. Indeed, why not? God can dictate the future as well as the past.

The foundations of Hebrew grammar were laid down long before Maimonides and the science of grammar was carefully studied by Saadia and the famous grammarians Menahem ben Saruk, Hayyuj and Ibn Janah, and was applied to the study of the Bible. The cognate languages, too, especially Arabic, were brought to bear upon the interpretation of difficult Hebrew words and phrases in the Bible. But all this did not affect the doctrinal and tendentious exegesis of the philosophers. Once grant the multiple meaning of the sacred text, exoteric and esoteric, and all difficulties vanish.

Strangely enough, Maimonides may be said to have inaugurated the study of comparative religion as an aid to the study of the biblical institutions. He did this as he did the rest in aid of his rationalistic hypothesis. If the Bible must accord with reason and its teaching of God must be in agreement with the conception of God attained by philosophy, the institution of sacrifices is an anomaly. To be sure, Maimonides could have read some esoteric doctrine in Leviticus as he did in Genesis and Ezekiel, but he could not break with the historical tradition which was continuous and showed beyond any doubt that the sacrifices were taken very seriously, that there was a Temple and a priestly and levitical caste. The Talmud devotes several treatises to the services in the Temple, the prayer book is full of references to the sacrifices, and the messianic hope is associated with the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the sacrifices. There must be some explanation

for this peculiar institution, which can not be allegorized. The creation story and the description of the divine chariot are just stories, they do not involve any practical institution. Here we are dealing with laws prescribing a very complicated ritual which occupied a central position in ancient Hebrew worship, a position incompatible with Maimonides's conception of God.

A similar difficulty arises in connection with the explanation of certain prohibitions in the Pentateuch, such as the wearing of garments of wool and flax mixed (*sha'atnez*), of shaving the corner of the beard, of seething a kid in its mother's milk, of sowing mixed seeds (*kil'aim*), and so on. What is the reason for these?

It is in order to explain these peculiar laws and institutions that Maimonides has recourse to comparative religion. He read, he tells us, all the works of the Sabeans, idolaters who lived in the time of Abraham, so far as these works were extant in Arabic. These Sabeans were star worshippers and practiced certain ceremonies analogous to those forbidden in the Bible to appease the stars and induce them to prosper their agricultural activities. The Sabeans also offered sacrifices to the stars. Moses desired to wean the Israelites away from idolatrous practices and lead them to the worship of the true God. With this object in view he followed a twofold method. Some of the rites he prohibited outright, the practice of offering sacrifices was regarded by the people as the very essence of religious worship. It would have been bad policy to prohibit it, as it would have involved a complete break with traditional custom. The Israelites would have refused to follow. As a clever statesman, Moses let them have their beloved sacrifices with all their pomp and ceremony, but with one proviso—they must sacrifice to the true God and not to the stars. Gradually, he hoped, as they came to understand the nature of the true God they would discontinue the sacrifices of their own accord (III, 29-32).

There is one important exception to the statement made above that in the time of Maimonides no one had undertaken any kind of historical or literary criticism of the Pentateuch. That exception is no less than the famous commentator Abraham ibn Ezra (1092-1167). But this very instance shows how rare such criticism was and how dangerous it was to speak of it plainly. It shows also

that historical and grammatical exegesis was not regarded as in any manner incompatible with the allegorical interpretation that was otherwise prevalent. For Ibn Ezra uses both. His comment on Ecclesiastes 5:7 is a good example of the current method of interpretation. The text reads:

אם-עשק רש וגל משפט וצדק תראה במדינה אל תחמה על  
החפץ כי גבה מעל גבה שמר וגבהים עליהם:

"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent perverting of justice and righteousness in the state, marvel not at the matter, for one higher than the high watcheth, and there are higher than they."

There would seem to be no difficulty in this passage that should call for an extraordinary comment. Ibn Ezra, however, says:

דע כי יש שומר שרואה זה החמס, ואיננו אחד רק הם רבים,  
וכל אחד גבוה מעל גבוה, ושומרים רבים לא ידע איש מספרם,  
כי הם גבוהים על אלה שמעלהם איננה שוה, והיודע סוד השם ידע  
כי גבוה מעל גבוה הם חמשים וחמשה, ולא אוכל לפרש

"Know that there is a watcher who sees this violence. He is not one, but there are many, and one is higher than the other. No one knows the number of the many watchers, for there are higher ones than these, and they are of different rank. He who knows the mystery of God knows that 'higher than the high' means fifty-five, but I cannot explain."

Obviously Ibn Ezra is not thinking of human watchers but of divine, and of a sort of hierarchy, and he ends up mysteriously, "He who knows the mystery of the Name, knows that 'higher than the high' are fifty-five."

What is all his mystery about? I have not seen any explanation of this cryptic remark anywhere, but the solution seems clear. According to Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* XII, 8, there are according to one theory fifty-five celestial spheres. The spheres were believed to be endowed with life and were moved by separate Intelligences or Spirits, each sphere having its own Intelligence. These Intelligences of Aristotle were identified by the Jewish Aristotelians with the biblical angels. As movers of the spheres they controlled also the terrestrial (sublunar) world, though the specific Intelligence in charge of sublunar existence was called the



Active Intellect. Thus fifty-five spheres were moved by fifty-five Intelligences or angels, who represented the celestial hierarchy in charge of mundane happenings.

At the same time the mystic and astrologer Ibn Ezra was a very keen grammarian and exegete. And if a comment like the one just mentioned could not be stated plainly (ולא אוכל לפרש) for fear of imparting esoteric doctrine to the uninitiated, the precaution must be still greater when suspicion is cast upon the authenticity of certain passages in the Pentateuch.

Ibn Ezra does not doubt the divine authority of the Pentateuch and he attacks unsparingly a certain Isaac ben Suleiman (d. 940) who denied the authority of the first chapter of Genesis, but certain passages in the Pentateuch troubled him, and his comment on Deut. 1:5:

בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה בָּאֵר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת

“beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, took Moses upon him to expound this law . . .” is as follows:

בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן . . . וְאֵם תִּכֵּן סוּד הַשָּׁנִים עֶשֶׂר, גַּם וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה, הוֹכֵנְעִי אוֹ בְּאֶרֶץ, כְּהֵרָה' יִרְאֶה, גַּם הֵנָּה עָרְשׁוֹ עָרֵשׁ בְּרוֹזֶל, תִּכֵּר הָאֵמֶת.

“Beyond Jordan . . . If you understand the mystery of the twelve, ‘And Moses wrote,’ ‘And the Canaanite was then in the land,’ ‘In the mountain of the Lord it shall be seen,’ ‘Behold his bed is a bed of iron,’ you will know the truth.” I do not know whether Spinoza was the first to penetrate Ibn Ezra’s secret, but there can be no doubt that his solution is correct.

The expression “beyond Jordan” to designate the east side of the river indicates that the passage must have been written on the west side, i. e., in Palestine. But Moses never was in Palestine, hence the verse was not written by Moses. In his remark on this passage Ibn Ezra indicates cryptically that this is not the only passage which must have been written later than the time of Moses. The last twelve verses of Deuteronomy recording the death of Moses could not have been written by Moses. The verse: “And Moses wrote this law. . .” (Deut. 31:9), speaks of Moses in the third person, hence it was written by someone else. If this is what Ibn Ezra meant, the argument is very weak, for with few

exceptions Moses is referred to in the third person throughout the Pentateuch and there was no need of singling out this particular passage. Moreover the *Gallic War* always speaks of Caesar in the third person. Possibly Ibn Ezra had something else in mind. Gen. 12:6, describing Abram's passage through Canaan and arriving in Shechem, notes that the "Canaanite was then in the land," thus implying that in the time of the writer the Canaanite was no longer in the land. Hence it must have been written after the Israelitish conquest. It is possible, indeed, that the remark means: "the Canaanite was then *already* in the land," as compared with a time anterior to Moses when some other people occupied the land. And, in fact, Ibn Ezra's comment on the passage is: "It is possible that Canaan took the land away from some one else; but if this is not the meaning, then there is a mystery here, and the wise will keep silent." Again a mystery. Spinoza, however, points out that in Gen. 10:19, which names the original inhabitants of the land, we are told that "the border of the Canaanite was from Sidon, as thou goest toward Gerar, unto Gazah; as thou goest toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboim unto Lasha." Hence the Canaanites were the original inhabitants, and the word "then" can not mean "then already," but then still in the land, as compared with the time of the writer, when the Canaanites were no longer there. In Gen. 22:14, Mount Moriah is called the mount of God, but it did not become the mount of God until it was chosen as the site of the temple. Finally in Deut. 3:11, speaking of Og King of Bashan, the text says: "Only Og King of Bashan remained of the remnant of the Rephaim; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbah of the children of Ammon?" This reference to his bedstead was clearly written long after the time of Og, who was a contemporary of Moses and whose defeat Moses describes to his own generation.

Precisely what Ibn Ezra had in mind as an explanation of these mysteries, it is hard to tell. Probably nothing more serious than the suggestion that the verses in question are interpolations. But in Ibn Ezra's day that was serious enough. It is to be hardly assumed that Ibn Ezra meant to deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as a whole.

Spinoza found a kindred spirit in Ibn Ezra. But he was free.

He cast off the traditional shackles and spoke his mind. And in so doing, he laid the foundations of biblical criticism.

Spinoza's fame as a philosopher so overshadowed his achievement as a biblical critic that among the voluminous writings on Spinoza there is scarcely anything that deals with his critical exegesis.<sup>1</sup>

For the first time in history Spinoza lays down the axiom that to understand the Bible we must approach it without prejudice or preconceptions. The Bible must be treated like any other ancient book. Or, in his own words, "The method of interpreting Scripture does not widely differ from the method of interpreting nature—in fact it is almost the same. For as the interpretation of nature consists in the examination of the history of nature and therefrom, as from established data, deducing definitions of natural phenomena, so Scriptural interpretation ought to proceed by the examination of Scripture and therefrom, as from established principles and data, deducing the intention of its authors in the proper manner" (VII, 6-7, ed. Bruder).<sup>2</sup>

The divine origin of the Bible must be a conclusion and not a premise. And as far as possible we must get the meaning of Scripture from Scripture itself.

All this sounds obvious to us now. In Spinoza's day it required all the courage of the lonely and independent thinker to suggest so simple an idea. The accepted view was that of Maimonides which we discussed before.

Spinoza was aware that he was making a revolutionary suggestion, and the author whom he expressly opposes is Maimonides, whose statement he quotes. "The opinion of Maimonides," he says, "was widely different. He asserted that each passage in Scripture admits of various, nay, contrary meanings; but that we could never be certain of any particular interpretation until we knew that the passage, as we interpreted it, contained nothing con-

<sup>1</sup> See Karppe, *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire de Philosophie*, Paris, 1902, p. 143. Cf., however, Leo Strauss, "Cohens Analyse der Bibelwissenschaft Spinozas" in *Der Jude*, VIII, 1924, pp. 295-314.

<sup>2</sup> Spinoza's biblical criticism is contained in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. The translations are taken from R. H. M. Elwes in Bohn's Libraries though he is not always accurate. The English reader need not confine himself to the passages quoted, but for the benefit of the student, who may desire to verify the quotations in the original Latin, I have indicated the references to Bruder's edition, by chapter and section.

trary or repugnant to reason. If the literal interpretation clashes with reason, then though the passage seems perfectly clear, it must be interpreted differently" (*ibid.*, 75).

As an instance of this canon of interpretation Spinoza mentions the passage in Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, which has been quoted so often that it almost seems a commonplace, namely the statement of Maimonides in Ch. 25 of the Second Part of the *Guide*, which he makes in connection with his discussion of the origin of the world.

Aristotle believed in the eternity of the world and gave certain proofs in support of his opinion. Maimonides is bold enough to disagree with Aristotle and rejects eternity in favor of creation in time. Fearing that his motive might be misunderstood and that he might be charged with theological prejudice unbecoming in a scientific philosopher, Maimonides says: "Know that the reason we reject the doctrine of eternity of the world is not because of the biblical texts which say that the world originated in time. For the texts concerning the origin of the world are no more numerous than those which speak of God in corporeal terms. Moreover, the gates of interpretation are not closed or impassible in the matter of the origin of the world. We could interpret them metaphorically as we interpreted metaphorically those passages which ascribe corporeality to God. In fact, it would be much easier to do this here than in the other case. But there are two reasons why we do not do so in this case. One is that the incorporeality of God is clearly proved by reason and hence it was necessary to interpret metaphorically those passages which literally understood, clash with reason. But the eternity of the world has not been proved, and hence there is no need of doing violence to the text and explaining it allegorically in favor of an unproved opinion. The second reason is this: Belief in the incorporeality of God is not opposed to the fundamental principles of our religion, whereas to believe in the eternity of the world would upset the basis of religion. . . ."

"Such are the words of Maimonides," says Spinoza, in commenting on the passage just quoted, "and they are evidently sufficient to establish our point. For if he had been convinced by reason that the world is eternal, he would not have hesitated to twist and explain away the words of Scripture till he made them appear to teach this doctrine. He would have felt quite sure that

Scripture, though everywhere plainly denying the eternity of the world, really intends to teach it. So that, however clear the meaning of Scripture may be, he would not feel certain of having grasped it, so long as he remained doubtful of the truth of what was written.

"... If such a theory as this were sound, I would certainly grant that some faculty beyond the natural reason is required for interpreting Scripture. For nearly all things that we find in Scripture cannot be inferred from known principles of natural reason, and, therefore, we should be unable to come to any conclusion about their truth, or about the real meaning and intention of Scripture, but should stand in need of some further assistance.

"Further, the truth of this theory would involve that the masses, having generally no comprehension of, nor leisure for, detailed proofs, would be reduced to receiving all their knowledge of Scripture on the authority and testimony of philosophers, and consequently, would be compelled to suppose that the interpretations given by philosophers were infallible.

"Truly this would be a new form of ecclesiastical authority, and a new sort of priests or pontiffs, more likely to excite men's ridicule than their veneration" (*ibid.*, 77-79).

Spinoza continues in the same vein in criticism of Maimonides, ending up with the following scathing remark: "Therefore, the method of Maimonides is clearly useless; to which we may add that it does away with all the certainty which the masses acquire by candid reading, or which is gained by any other persons in any other way. In conclusion, then, we dismiss Maimonides' theory as harmful, useless, and absurd" (*ibid.*, 86-87).

From Spinoza's fundamental principle that the method of interpreting Scripture is similar to the method of interpreting nature, he draws the following corollaries.

1. We must know "the nature and properties of the language in which the books of the Bible were written, and in which their authors were accustomed to speak."
2. We must make "an analysis of each book and an arrangement of its contents under heads. We should also note all the passages which are ambiguous or obscure, or which seem mutually contradictory."
3. We should investigate the "environment of all the prophetic

books extant; that is, the life, the conduct, and the studies of the author of each book, who he was, what was the occasion and the epoch of his writing, whom did he write for, and in what language. Further we should inquire into the fate of each book: how it was first received, into whose hands it fell, how many different versions there were of it, by whose advice was it received into the Bible, and, lastly, how all the books now universally accepted as sacred, were united into a single whole" (*ibid.*, 15-25).

Spinoza is aware that it is easier to lay down the prerequisites for an understanding of Scripture than to follow them out in practice. He enumerates the difficulties attaching to language, in the case of the O. T. the Hebrew language. We know it imperfectly by reason of historical accident, such as the loss of all ancient Hebrew literature except a small fraction thereof contained in the Hebrew Bible; then there are the difficulties and ambiguities inherent in the structure of the language itself, such as the lack of vowels, the incomplete character of Hebrew moods and tenses, and so on.

To get a complete history of the books of the Bible and its authors is now impossible. And so Spinoza concludes his enumeration of the difficulties as follows:

"The foregoing difficulties in this method of interpreting Scripture from its own history, I conceive to be so great that I do not hesitate to say that the true meaning of Scripture is in many places inexplicable, or at best mere subject for guesswork." However, he does not despair, because these difficulties apply only to certain parts of the Bible, "when we endeavor to follow the meaning of a prophet in matters which can not be perceived, but only imagined." There is enough left that we can understand. "The precepts of true piety are expressed in very ordinary language, and are equally simple and easily understood." . . . "Therefore we need not be much troubled about what remains; such matters, inasmuch as we generally can not grasp them with our reason and understanding, are more curious than profitable" (*ibid.*, 65-69).

Spinoza did not content himself with laying down rules for the study of the Bible, he made use of them himself in his investigation and obtained certain interesting results, some of which I shall now briefly indicate.

In his discussion of prophecy he says: "Our conclusions on the

subject must be drawn solely from Scripture; for what can we affirm about matters transcending our knowledge except what is told us by the words or writings of prophets? And since there are, so far as I know, no prophets now alive, we have no alternative but to read the books of prophets departed, taking care the while not to reason from metaphor or to ascribe anything to our authors which they do not themselves distinctly state" (*ibid.*, I, 7).

"A perusal of the sacred books will show us that all God's revelations to the prophets were made through words or appearances, or a combination of the two. These words and appearances were of two kinds: 1. *real*, when external to the mind of the prophet who heard or saw them. 2. *imaginary*, when the imagination of the prophet was in a state which led him distinctly to suppose that he heard or saw them" (*ibid.*, 9).

Referring to the Sinaitic revelation, he says: "Scripture seems clearly to point to the belief that God spoke himself, having descended from heaven to Mt. Sinai for the purpose. . . . Further, the law of Moses . . . nowhere prescribed the belief that God is without body, or even without form or figure . . . it forbade the Jews to invent or fashion any likeness of the Deity, but this was to insure purity of service. . . . Nevertheless the Bible clearly implies that God has a form" (*ibid.*, 17).

"Revelation may be through figures only, as in I Chronicles, 22, where God displays his anger to David by means of an angel bearing a sword, and also in the story of Balaam" (*ibid.*, 19).

Here again he pays his respects to Maimonides very frankly.

"Maimonides and others," he says, "do indeed maintain that these and every other instance of angelic apparitions . . . occurred during sleep, for that no one with his eyes open ever could see an angel, but this is mere nonsense. The sole object of such commentators seems to be to extort from Scripture confirmations of Aristotelian quibbles and their own inventions, a proceeding which I regard as the acme of absurdity" (*ibid.*).

He (Spinoza) further concludes from his examination of the prophetic books that "the prophets were endowed with unusually vivid imaginations, and not with unusually perfect minds (Solomon was the wisest of all men, but had no special faculty of prophecy) " . . . "To suppose that knowledge of natural and spiritual phenomena can be gained from the prophetic books, is an utter mis-

take." "Prophecies varied not only according to the imagination and physical temperament of the prophet, but also according to his particular opinions; and prophecy never rendered the prophet wiser than he was before" (II, 1-3). Prophetic knowledge is inferior to natural knowledge, for the prophets required a sign to assure them of the truth of the revelation, whereas natural knowledge, like mathematical, carries its own certitude with it.

"Everyone," he says, "has been strangely hasty in affirming that the prophets knew everything within the scope of human intellect; and although certain passages of Scripture plainly affirm that the prophets were in certain respects ignorant, such persons would rather say that they do not understand the passages than admit that there was anything which the prophets did not know; or else they try to wrest the Scriptural words away from their evident meaning. . . . If either of these proceedings is allowable, we may as well shut our Bibles, for vainly shall we attempt to prove anything from them if their plainest passages may be classed among obscure and impenetrable mysteries, or if we may put any interpretation on them which we fancy" (*ibid.*, 25).

Spinoza concludes therefore that "in matters of theory without bearing on charity or morality the prophets could be, and in fact were, ignorant and held conflicting opinions. It therefore follows that we must by no means go to the prophets for knowledge either of natural or of spiritual phenomena" (*ibid.*, 52).

In his discussion of miracles, Spinoza virtually abandons his own canons of interpretation. Spinoza's conception of God and nature leads to a definite rejection of miracles in the sense of a breach in natural law brought about by an intervention of the Deity for a certain purpose. Spinoza states this very plainly. Instead, however, of following his own rule and proceeding to an impartial examination of Scripture, which would of course show that the authors of the biblical narratives believed miracles possible, Spinoza in this case, it would seem, is either not quite honest with himself or was really misled into adopting a method of interpretation which is not so different from that he so execrates in Maimonides. He actually attempts to show that the Bible itself taught a belief in the inviolability of natural law. He cites such passages as that "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:10), or "He hath also established them [the heavens] for ever and ever;



He hath made a decree which shall not be transgressed" (Ps. 148: 6); or the passage in Jeremiah (31: 36): "If these ordinances [i. e., of the moon and the stars] depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever." As if the authors of the Bible were familiar with the philosophy of Spinoza, and as if a few poetical expressions can be used to countervail all the accounts of miracles in the narrative portions of the Pentateuch. These, he explains, have been misunderstood because "Scripture does not explain things by their secondary causes, but only narrates them in the order and the style which has most power to move men, and especially, uneducated men, to devotion; and therefore it speaks inaccurately of God and of events, seeing that its object is not to convince the reason, but to attract and lay hold of the imagination" (VI, 49). He goes into certain detailed explanations, he tells us, "lest anyone should, by wrongly interpreting a miracle, rashly suspect that he has found something in Scripture contrary to human reason" (*ibid.*, 52). But this latter motive was precisely what led Maimonides to his interpretations, which Spinoza thinks so absurd.

Likewise Spinoza gets into difficulties when he discusses the meaning of the Divine Law (ch. IV). Here again Spinoza, to be consistent with his metaphysical system, can not admit that God can be conceived as a law-giver or potentate ordaining laws for men. God is identical with the universe, and the laws of God are the laws of nature, necessary, universal and unchangeable.

However, instead of admitting that the authors of the biblical books had a different opinion and did conceive of God as a "potentate ordaining laws for men," Spinoza attempts to show that the Bible agrees with his philosophy, as Maimonides tried to show that the Bible agrees with Aristotle's philosophy. To prove his point, he again has recourse to the poetic books of the Bible, thus: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding," for "wisdom gives length of days, and riches and honour; her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3: 16, 17), and other similar passages. This, says Spinoza, teaches that salvation is dependent upon knowledge, which of course includes the knowledge that all things are governed by necessity and that God does not give commandments to man,

rewarding him for obedience and punishing him for disobedience irrespective of the natural result of his conduct.

But the ceremonial law is a stumbling block in Spinoza's path as it was in that of Maimonides. What does he do with it? He tries to make it out that Isaiah and Jeremiah and the Psalmist did not take the ceremonial law seriously. The passages he quotes are the well-known ones—Isaiah 1:10; Ps. 40:7-9; Jer. 9:23. All this in spite of Leviticus. And he sums up the matter by saying that the object of the ceremonial law was to perpetuate the State, "that men should do nothing of their own free will, but should always act under external authority, and should continually confess by their actions and thoughts that they were not their own masters, but were entirely under the control of others. From all these considerations it is clearer than day that ceremonies have nothing to do with a state of blessedness, and that those mentioned in the Old Testament, i. e., the whole Mosaic law, had reference merely to the Government of the Jews, and merely temporal advantages" (*ibid.*, V, 31).

I confess that if I had to choose between Maimonides and Spinoza in this particular point, I should prefer Maimonides. Happily I am not forced to either.

The real contribution of Spinoza to biblical criticism, apart from the canons of interpretation, which he did not, as we have seen, follow successfully himself in certain cases, are the chapters on the authorship of the Pentateuch and the historical and prophetic books (VIII-X). Whatever we may say about the specific conclusions, his method is that of modern textual, historical and literary criticism, and many of the points he made are now commonplaces of Biblical criticism. He argues against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, though he is not yet familiar with the documentary hypothesis, and conjectures that Ezra was the author of the Pentateuch. "Ezra," he says, "did not put the finishing touches to the narratives contained therein, but merely collected the histories from various writers, and sometimes simply set them down, leaving their examination and arrangement to posterity."

These chapters in the *Theological-Political Tractate* are full of interesting details, and the interested student is advised to read them for himself.